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Flaying the Lute.

A VISION OF HEAVEN.

BY

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A VISION OF HEAVEN.

As I sat meditating on death and the unseen world of spirits, my thoughts became wholly absorbed in the contemplation of the subject until the mind was lost in speculation. The material world gradually faded from sight, and those imperfectly defined images, and that vague consciousness, perceived at the gentle approach of sleep, finally yielded to emotions more vivid and scenes more wonderful than I ever before experienced or witnessed, though there were none of those strange incongruities and absurdities so often connected with dreams, but everything seemed real and consistent, a condition which might be compared to life without decay, vigor without lassitude, energy without weari-

ness, repose without inactivity, beauty without deformity, and sublimity without terror.

I seemed to be in a strange place, where the persons and objects about me were unfamiliar, but what was more remarkable were the unusual thoughts and emotions of which I was conscious. The period had arrived, I supposed, which had often been anticipated with mingled feelings of joy and fear, desire and dread, — the hour of death. Though enduring great physical suffering, the mind was clear, with every intellectual faculty in vigorous operation, while all earthly emotions were subdued, and the moral sense was free from human imperfection. So clear and rapid were the operations of the mental powers that the events and experiences of a lifetime passed in quick succession, when they were divested of all that was false and trivial. The struggle between the material and the spiritual, which had continued through life,

now became intense, and the soul, like an imprisoned bird fluttering against the resisting bars of its narrow cage, labored to burst the bonds of clay and soar to the mansions on high. The senses, one after another, became unconscious of earthly things, while the sight, closed to the material world, beheld forms of celestial mould.

Angelic beings, radiant in glory, hovered near; loved ones of earth, long since gone, yet quickly recognized, with unutterable love and tenderness, beckoned me away. One more struggle between the physical and the spiritual, and the longing spirit was free. The mystery was solved; the veil was rent asunder, and the emancipated soul was introduced into the eternal habitations. There was so great a contrast between the past and present condition that at first my mind was absorbed in contemplating the new circumstances of my situation. I be-

gan to understand the mystery of my being and the nature and capabilities of my faculties as never before. There was no confusion of ideas, no conflict of emotions, while there was perfect harmony, a consciousness of immortal vigor, a freedom from all suffering and all imperfection, unutterable joy at being released from earthly ills and forgiven for all past offences.

I was not alone in this new mode of life, for there were those heavenly messengers of whom the departed spirit had vague impressions before its exit, now my constant attendants, who had been sent from the court of heaven to conduct me to the celestial city. They hovered about my dying couch, only half revealing their shadowy forms, lest the mortal vision be overpowered by their heavenly glory; they cheered and illuminated my passage through the mystical Jordan, and stood beyond its turbid waters ready to receive me to their loving care. One

of the glorious band had been appointed at my birth as my special guardian, and to his particular care I was consigned to be instructed, and guided to the final abode of the blessed. To this guardian angel I was irresistibly attracted, for I had an instinctive consciousness that he comprehended me, having taken an interest in my destiny during my earthly pilgrimage, being present when danger and temptations beset my path; that he had suggested noble and holy thoughts, to keep me from being overcome by man's arch-deceiver. Though so glorious and exalted, possessing attributes and powers marvellous to mortals, yet I had no fear of my heavenly conductor. Notwithstanding the consciousness of almost unlimited inferiority, it caused no *painful* sense of insignificance or repression, and I could not fail to improve rapidly under his tuition. He revealed to me much of the mysterious connection and mutual influ-

ence of mind and matter; the origin, history, and ultimate destination of material substances, their inherent properties and the hidden laws by which they are governed. Though my spirit had left its clayey tenement, it still lingered on this planet to investigate the wonders and beauties of the creation displayed in man's earthly habitation. Being endowed with marvellous powers of motion, I could pass from one part of our globe to another almost as quick as thought; besides, I was endowed with new senses, so that I could perceive the latent properties of the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. My guide instructed me in the history of our world, explained the interesting yet mysterious phenomena connected with its formation, which had engrossed the perplexed attention of the most profound philosophers and scientists; but the most complete harmony pervaded the works of the Creator when examined

by my newly-developed powers. All apparent incongruities and mysteries in the Divine government were reconciled, and all appeared so complete, so consistent, so just, and so beautiful, as to excite admiration and profound homage. I was permitted to behold scenes and investigate subjects I had ardently desired to do when on earth, but was wholly incompetent for the task.

The most charming prospects were opened before me, with nothing to mar the scene. The power of combinations and contrasts, of light and shade, the harmonious blending of colors, the perfect symmetry of form, were more fully understood. The power of sight had so vastly expanded that it exceeded all the efforts of human skill to attain: the most insignificant flower revealed hidden beauties never before suspected; so the ear was exquisitely attuned to the harmony of sounds, and from the hum of

the tiniest insect to the roar of the cataract there was perfect concord in Nature's music.

In all the Creator's works there were such wisdom, goodness, power, and love displayed as to awaken in the soul the most exquisite sense of happiness, confidence, love, gratitude, humility, wonder, and reverence. The consciousness that this great and holy Being was my Friend, that He condescended to admit me, once a sinful creature, to dwell in His presence, secure from all harm and fear, that He had endowed me with so wonderful capacities for enjoyment and the acquisition of knowledge, and had gratified those desires to their largest extent, filled me with blissful emotions, too intense for expression. My angelic guide and instructor explained what was too difficult for my untaught faculties to comprehend, and gave a history of the human race, explaining the mysterious dealings of God with nations, illustrated His justice,

goodness, and mercy towards the race in His dispensations, and unfolded far more of the wonders of the plan of redemption than were developed in the Word and works of the Creator. This was a theme that awakened peculiar emotions, different, in many respects, from those inspired by the wonders of creation; it touched a chord whose vibrations thrilled through every part of my being until I was almost overpowered by a sense of love to the Author of my salvation.

My heavenly companion unfolded my own personal history, made clear its dark passages, showed the tenderness and benevolence of my Heavenly Father in His dispensations towards me, explained the necessity of various afflictions, sufferings, trials, and temptations, which had been my lot, and showed me the dangers I had escaped through Divine interposition, and the ruin that would have followed had my blind schemes and perverted will succeeded.

In my progress over our planet I frequently encountered other spirits, with their guides, engaged in similar pursuits; some were about leaving this sphere for heaven, while others had just entered upon their new life. I inquired of my instructor why happy spirits did not go directly to their celestial home after death, when he replied, "A mental preparation was needful before the departed saint could enter upon the joys and employments of heaven. There is so great a contrast between the condition on earth and the glories of the celestial world that without a special preparation the spirit would be dazzled and overwhelmed. It is important that the intellectual faculties should be more fully developed and expanded, and a more thorough knowledge of the works of the Creator should be obtained, especially such as related to the well-being of the race, and a more thorough acquaintance with the fundamental truths of

science and morals that form the basis of God's universal government should be made before entering upon the lofty themes which engross the attention of the inhabitants of heaven."

My thoughts had been so fully employed with the new and wonderful scenes open to my sight, and the blissful emotions they had awakened, that higher degrees of glory and higher pursuits of knowledge seemed hardly possible, but now I began to feel an impulse to rise higher, and as every desire was sinless, it was no sooner felt than gratified. I inquired whether redeemed spirits ever revisited the scenes of their earthly existence, and the angel replied, "They do occasionally return for a visit to their friends they have left, for whom they still cherish a loving interest. Heaven," said my companion, "is a place remote from this planet, and in our progress thither we have a view of innumerable worlds, an investigation of which will form a

part of your future studies. The abode of the righteous constitutes the centre of all other systems; it is a world of vast magnitude, combining the glories of all others. It is the masterpiece of the Divine Architect, where His skill is displayed in the highest degree of perfection. It is not only the home of angels and the redeemed of earth, but of all other sinless beings from the planets who have completed their mission and were found worthy to receive their crown."

While listening to the description of the heavenly home, I felt an irresistible longing to enter this rest, when we soon ascended from earth, and soaring away through the vast regions of space alighted in safety before the golden gate of the heavenly city, where we were welcomed by numerous celestial beings and departed saints, some of whom I had known on earth, especially those endeared by the ties of

kindred. Many sorrowful years had passed since our separation, which to me had been years of suffering, sadness, and loneliness, but to them of joy, rest, and advancement in knowledge.

Now the reunion, long waited for, was consummated, and the holy rapture of the inexpressible scene, enhanced by the consciousness that no future partings would interrupt our heavenly intercourse, gave a thrill of joy so intense that without it heaven would have been less attractive. I could not refrain from looking with delight inexpressible on my friends, especially on her who had watched my infant years and first taught me to repeat our Lord's Prayer, and had guided my youthful steps in the path of virtue. The fountain of her maternal love seemed to overflow as she received another of her little flock, while two others who had walked with her the golden streets of the New Jerusalem stood by rejoicing at the meeting.

All the saints appeared surpassingly beautiful. Their spiritual bodies, similar to those they had on earth, but greatly superior, were rendered faultless, with no signs of weariness, while they possessed youthful vigor and constituted a proper abode for the soul. Their crowns and harps of gold, their robes of spotless white, the emblem of purity, their voices of enchanting sweetness and melody, their beautiful countenances beaming with love and intelligence, yet each retaining distinctive features, their graceful movements, and, above all, their perfect union of soul and freedom from any imperfection, fitted them for the companionship of the high orders of celestial beings with whom they associated.

With this heavenly company, but infinitely above them all in the glory and perfection of His character, was One who was the chief attraction of heaven. Towards Him all eyes were

directed, and before Him all worshippers were prostrate. Angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, and all the innumerable orders of celestial beings and all the saints from different spheres, joined in celebrating the praises of the Lamb that was slain. To those who had been redeemed by His blood, He sustained a peculiar relation awakening emotions unknown to those who had never sinned. It was, to the redeemed, a source of mingled joy, wonder, and humility that they were permitted to behold the face of Him whom they had longed to see, and to dwell forever in His presence with no cloud of darkness to obscure their sight.

All the heavenly inhabitants spoke the same language, which was a direct communication of mind with mind, adapted to abstract and intellectual ideas, and conveyed just the thoughts intended. Though each soul retained its peculiarities and tastes, there was no clashing of

interests, no discords, no suspicions, no jealousies; every one was governed by the law of perfect love. These features in the social economy of heaven presented the most striking contrasts to those of earth, where all, even the saints, are sometimes influenced by selfishness. Entire confidence in one another, the absence of all suspicion, and misunderstanding of motives, acts, and words, the complete harmony existing in all the relations of this heavenly state, were but faintly symbolized by the communion of the saints on earth; pure, exalted friendship is known in heaven; its type only, exists on earth. Selfishness will blight it, even by its shadow; therefore it quickly withers, except on its native soil. The perfect union of an infinite company of different capacities, tastes, habits, and degrees of knowledge was understood by the fact that each one was governed by supreme love to God, and perfect love

to all holy beings. No one was poor, lonely, neglected, or unhappy; all met on an equality; there were no envious distinctions as to favors; all were as happy as their capacities allowed.

The scenery of heaven was infinitely and agreeably diversified, so that the constantly progressive minds of its inhabitants found employment without tedious repetition. The grand and lofty mountains, the beautiful valleys, the sublime cataracts, the peaceful flowing rivers, the flowery meads, adorned and diversified its extensive domains. Flowers of fadeless beauty and countless varieties grew in bountiful profusion and exhaled the most delicious odors, while the waters of the lakes and streams were clear as crystal, so that their golden sands, sparkling diamonds, and glittering pearls were distinctly visible beneath the gentle waves. On their banks grew the Tree of Life, of pre-eminent loftiness, whose shadowing branches

yielded ambrosial fruits that imparted immortal vigor to those who partook of them. Balmy groves, clear fountains, hills adorned with majestic palms, flowery glens and radiant lawns, shady recesses and leafy bowers, were most delightfully interspersed. Nor was there wanting in this celestial abode the grandest and most sublime scenery. Mountains whose immeasurable heights were veiled in majesty surpassing the most awe-inspiring of those on earth, vast seas and roaring cataracts, precipitous cliffs and immense caverns, all to be studied and admired as works of the Infinite Creator.

None were idle there, but all were variously employed according to each one's tastes and capacities. Some were discoursing about the intricate truths of natural science, and trying to penetrate its deep mysteries hitherto concealed; another group was engaged in arranging garlands of myrtle, laurel, and amaranthine flowers

to adorn their dearly-loved companions, conversing meanwhile about heavenly themes. Another company, whose eyes expressed the most tender emotions, were held in breathless attention by the glowing words of an eloquent seraph who was unfolding to them the mysteries of redemption. Some were conversing about the scenes, trials, and dangers of their earthly career, and as they recalled their past history of sins and sorrows, they felt a livelier gratitude and deeper humility. Among all the different circles, none seemed happier than the older saints engaged in the instruction of the infant spirits, like "Vernal flowers that scent the morn, but wither in the rising day." They had faded from earth ere their pure souls had felt the blight of sin. These little ones formed by far the largest company of those who had passed from earth. One, pre-eminent among them for her loveliness, I had known and loved, but she

had been early transferred from an uncongenial clime to bloom in the radiance of a heavenly world.

In the central and most elevated part of this wonderful scene stood the celestial city, the New Jerusalem, with its lofty towers and glittering walls, rendering it an object of attraction to the most distant beholder. The ascent to the city was by flights of steps wrought in beautiful mosaics of precious stones. These flights were interspersed with terraces overspread with flowers of infinite variety, arranged to produce the most agreeable effect, while here and there were fountains imparting freshness to the blossoms. This remarkable city surpassed in beauty and magnificence everything the imagination could conceive. It was a quadrangle of immense proportions, surrounded by a lofty wall composed of the most costly gems. The base of the wall or foundation consisted of

twelve different layers of precious stones. The *first* compartment was jasper of a beautiful green variegated with red and yellow; then followed the sapphire, a gem of heavenly blue, the chalcedony of bluish white, and the emerald of vivid green. These stones were wrought with the most beautiful devices illustrating the history of the redeemed, while the names and deeds of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb were most conspicuous. The *second* compartment comprised the sardonyx of orange hue, a cornelian of red, the chrysolite, a translucent crystal of a gold color, and the deep green beryl. The gems in this compartment were wrought into tracery and fret work of inimitable designs. The *third* and last compartment was composed of the yellow topaz, the chrysoprase, a beautiful yellowish-green stone, the red jacinth, and the purple amethyst. These gems were set in pure gold in the form of different flowers.

These three compartments of precious stones constituted the foundation of the wall, while the superstructure was of polished jasper, "clear as crystal," with ornaments of the most skilful and elaborate workmanship.

The vast extent of surface these walls presented was relieved of monotony by an agreeable arrangement of buttresses, arches, finials, canopies, embattlements, pinnacles, and towers; but the crowning glory of these heaven-built walls was the lofty gates, each made of one massive pearl. There were twelve of these gates, three on each side of the city, guarded by angelic warders. These portals were arched by deeply recessed mouldings of alternate gold and gems, ornamented with flowery devices, and surmounted by lofty finials of rare splendor. These pearly gates were so curiously, elaborately, and beautifully wrought as to surpass description. Vast companies of the heav-

enly host were ascending and descending the steps to the city; others were walking its beautiful terraces; some were entering its pearly gates; while others were viewing the scene from its lofty battlements. My angelic guide conducted me through one of the spacious archways to the inside of the splendid structure. What a scene of glory and magnificence was presented to my enraptured vision. I gazed in astonishment at the sight of such ineffable glory until my senses were almost overpowered; but the longer I gazed the greater seemed the transcendent splendor. Human language is inadequate to convey an idea of the radiant beauty and marvellous wonders of the celestial city.

The River of Life, with its crystal stream, flowed between banks adorned with exquisite flowers, while rising above all were the heavenly palms, whose branches were borne in the triumphal processions of the victorious inhabit-

ants. The spacious streets were paved with burnished gold, which reflected the beautiful images flitting across the polished surfaces. Innumerable spacious mansions, fitted up with royal magnificence by the Divine Architect, adorned the streets; while on the Hill of Zion, in the central part of the city, stood the Temple of Jehovah, with the Throne of God and of the Lamb.

Towards this temple the angelic host and all the redeemed spirits directed their steps, when Gabriel sounded his trumpet, sending its loud and melodious notes to the most remote parts of heaven, calling the faithful to join in one vast chorus for the praise of Him who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb slain. With prompt alacrity and with heavenly joy they all assembled in the vast cathedral, built before the foundation of the world, with columns of immense size sparkling with gems and gold, and

supporting a vast dome whose top was lost in an abyss of radiant glory. In the cathedral stood the eternal throne of Jehovah of "unembodied, impalpable, etherial light, fulminating streams of living radiance," through all the vast creation. Overarching the throne were three bows of different hues mysteriously blended in one, typical of the Trinity of the Divine Being. Enveloped in clouds of ineffable glory dwelt the incorporeal, uncreated Essence of Divinity in awe-inspiring majesty.

The Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, having a corporeal form, was the object of the most intense devotion to all the innumerable worshippers. Allied to the Father and to the human race by His twofold nature, He was the medium of communication between the Creator and His subjects. The Son was the only representative of the union of the Divine and the human; He was the embodiment of majesty

and grace. His countenance shone with ineffable love; His eyes of penetrating glance reflected rays of Divine intelligence, softened by the tenderness of the Heavenly Dove. His garment of spotless white was encircled by a girdle of sparkling brilliants, while on His brow was a diadem of the most beautiful precious stones. Among all that vast throng of angels, archangels, seraphim, and cherubim that surround the throne, the Son was pre-eminent and peerless. Every eye was directed towards the throne waiting the signal for worship, when lo, it was enveloped in a cloud of ineffable glory. The angelic host covered their faces with their wings, and all the vast company of saints instantly prostrated themselves and cast their gold crowns at the feet of Him who had redeemed them by His blood, joining in one mighty song of praise to the Triune God. So great were the multitudes of heavenly worship-

pers that their voices were like the roaring of the sea, and the peal of mighty thunder.

The exercise of adoration being concluded, each worshipper resumed his crown and position, while one of the seraphs took the lyre and led the host in song, when all instantly joined with harp and voice in celebrating the praises of God and the Lamb. The divine harmony would now expand until all heaven was filled with its sound, and then sink so softly on the ear that the vibrations of an insect's wings could have been distinctly heard.

In that throng of worshippers were many who on earth had "held nations entranced" by the sweetness of their songs, and whose brows had been adorned by Fame's immortal wreath, and now their sweet melodies lent enchantment to the celestial choir. Pre-eminent among the gifted band were "Israel's sweet singer," whose sympathetic lyre had given joy and consolation

to afflicted hearts, the ancient bard whose hallowed lips had been purified by living fire from the heavenly altar, whose poetical numbers had gushed from a heart overflowing with tears for the desolations of Zion, and also one whose triumphant song was joined with that of the Lamb.

The company of martyrs constituted an immense throng, forming a countless multitude from different nations, arrayed in white robes, with palms in their hands, as they stood before the throne. They came out of great tribulation, and were with the Lamb and His company. They comprised saints who had given their lives for the truth before the Christian era, having been put to death by various methods, some of which were exceedingly cruel and revolting; for example, being sawn asunder, while others were burned, stoned, hanged, killed by the sword, and various other methods. The

angel designated many who had suffered a martyr's death, or who had endured persecutions on account of their godly lives, as Abel, who was the first of the human race to enter heaven, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets, and many whose names were unknown on earth, but were recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. Some of the angels had witnessed the death of Abel, and had conducted his spirit to the realms of glory and introduced him to the host of cherubim, seraphim, and other orders of celestial beings, with whom he became an object of interest and tender love. They knew about the creation of man, of his delightful home in Eden, his subsequent fall through the temptation of Satan, of his banishment from the garden, and the tragical death of Adam's son, who represented the saints that after their death would become inhabitants of heaven.

The angels who had maintained their allegiance to the Supreme Ruler for countless ages remembered the revolt and expulsion from heaven of Satan and his numerous followers, and the history of Adam, and they thought that if the members of the human family were admitted they might rebel, but one of the archangels informed his associates that though all men were sinners in consequence of the transgression of their primeval ancestor, they could be pardoned and saved only through a Mediator, by whose future sufferings and death He would make an atonement for their sins, and if they repented and believed in Him they would be eternally blessed. This Mediator was the beloved Son of God, and with the Father and Holy Spirit was the object of their worship.

For some time Abel's was the only human spirit that occupied the dominion of heaven, and, after others were admitted, he was the most

conspicuous among them on account of his righteous life and tragical death. The angel pointed out Enoch and Elijah, who were translated without suffering death, but whose earthly bodies had been changed from mortal to immortal. The company of martyrs who had suffered for their fidelity to God was very large, embracing prophets, apostles, members of the early church, victims of Paganism, Mohammedanism, and fanatics of the Christian Church, so called, during the dark ages, and later. These had maintained their principles amid the severest persecutions and the greatest sufferings. One of the most prominent of this class was the Apostle Paul, who stood beside Stephen, the first Christian martyr, now friends and fellow martyrs.

Among the redeemed were some who had occupied eminent positions on earth, as emperors, kings, queens, nobles, statesmen, poets,

L. of C.

authors, philosophers, scientists, and other famous scholars, but the larger part of the company of saints, when on earth, had been poor, neglected, and despised by their fellow creatures, and many of them had been wronged and deprived of liberty, and even of life.

There were missionaries, preachers, and other Christian laborers, surrounded by those they had been instrumental in saving. One prominent group comprised authors of religious literature, hymn-writers, and composers of sacred music, whose works had been instrumental in saving souls. A group of Sabbath-school teachers was surrounded by their pupils, who had been assisted in leading righteous lives by the instructions they received. There were many pious mothers whose faithful and constant instructions had led their children to the Saviour, some in early life, and others in later years. The companies of little children were

numerous, but one of the most interesting of these was that of the babes of Bethlehem, whose lives had been taken by the cruel decree of Herod. It is not possible to specify all the different classes or their numbers, but they were all extremely happy, and united in rendering homage to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As my angelic guide was pointing out the different groups, a constant procession of saints of all ages, and from different nations, who had just left their earthly abode, passed through the gates of the eternal city, and their expression of joy and surprise was great when they saw the glory of their everlasting home.

The inexpressibly wonderful scenes I had witnessed made such an impression on my mind and heart that I asked my guide to allow me to remain, and not return to earth, but he said I had not accomplished my work there, there-

fore I must return, but when it was faithfully done I should be admitted to this heavenly company to abide forever.

When I awoke from this remarkable vision or dream, I was so impressed with what I had witnessed that I could think of nothing else for a long time.

S. M. B.

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